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# *Memorial Honors Bomber Crews After Decades in the Shadows*

By JOHN F. BURNS

LONDON — Just once, in a raid over Düsseldorf in 1944, Jack Watson said on Thursday, he had a momentary misgiving about the carpet bombing of German cities that became, after World War II, one of the most controversial aspects of the Allied operations that won the war.

It came on a rare daylight raid as Mr. Watson, a flight engineer and an occasional bomb-aimer, looked down from 20,000 feet and released the payload beneath him in one of the four-engined Lancaster aircraft that were the workhorses of the Royal Air Force Bomber Command. The Lancaster's role was mainly in "area bombing" — mostly night raids that targeted whole areas of Germany's main industrial cities.

The Düsseldorf attack was one of thousands of British raids that historians say killed at least 300,000 German civilians, and possibly double that. A total of 55,573 aircrew members were also killed, nearly half of the 125,000 who flew. Winston Churchill, an enthusiastic proponent of the raids in the darkest years of the war, effectively disowned them after 1945, and Bomber Command veterans, unlike other components of Britain's war machine, struggled in the postwar years with what seemed to many a pariah status.

Mr. Watson, now 88, was one of 1,450 surviving aircrew members who gathered on Thursday in a lush park in the heart of London to savor the recognition denied to them, and to the fallen crewmen, for nearly 70 years.

That recognition came in a ceremony at which Queen Elizabeth II formally inaugurated an imposing memorial in pillared white stone to the men who died, along with an imposing bronze statue of a Lancaster crew, seven men in sheepskin flying jackets, boots and leather helmets, frozen in attitudes of resolve and apprehension in the last moments before a mission.

"When I pushed the button and saw the bombs going down, I saw what looked like a housing estate, and I thought, 'There are women and children down there,'" recalled Mr. Watson, who was 21 at the time. "But right away, I had to get back to scanning the sky for German fighters and ack-ack batteries, and my mind moved on. Apart from that, I never, ever had any doubt that what I was doing was right."

For Queen Elizabeth, 86, an ambulance driver in the war, the ceremony was another high point in the year of her 60th anniversary on the throne. On Wednesday, she was in Northern Ireland, marking progress in the fragile peace settlement there with a previously unimaginable handshake with Martin McGuinness, a former Irish Republican Army leader and now deputy first minister of Northern Ireland. Back in London, the theme of reconciliation, and rapturous acclaim from the crowds, were renewed at the Bomber Command dedication.

For many of the 6,000 invited guests, it was a day they never expected to arrive. Twenty years ago, the queen's mother, Elizabeth, dedicated a London statue of Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, chief architect of the area bombing campaign. One of many snubs endured by Bomber Command came when Mr. Churchill denied Sir Arthur, known as Bomber Harris, the ennoblement routinely bestowed on other wartime commanders like Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, who became Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, site of the North African desert battle that turned the tide of battle against the German Army there.

There was no Bomber Command campaign medal of the kind issued for almost every other major phase of the war, and no mention of the bomber crews' role in Churchill's victory speech after the German surrender in May 1945.

The perception among the aircrews — and historians who have written numerous books on the subject — was that the bombing campaign became a political liability after the firebombing of Dresden in February 1945, one of the most devastating air raids of the war, now believed to have killed at least 27,000 civilians, and the shock of discovering, as Allied forces rolled into Germany, that Allied bombing had reduced many major German cities to rubble. At a time when the horrors of the Holocaust were being revealed, few in Britain had the stomach to acknowledge that Allied forces, too, had caused large numbers of civilian deaths.

Eventually momentum gathered behind a memorial proposal, but the British government contributed no money. Instead, private donations to a campaign led by the British-born pop singer Robin Gibb of the Bee Gees, who died last month, accounted for the nearly $12 million needed.

At Thursday's dedication, surviving airmen, mostly in their late 80s and early 90s, from a dozen or more countries that included Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Poland and Czechoslovakia, found time to repeat many of the old arguments about the bombing between the reunions that brought them together, many for the first time since their grim nights together over wartime Germany.

*Shame over civilian deaths deferred recognition of fliers.*

Had Churchill abandoned them to save his own reputation? Was the Dresden raid, so close to the end of the war, unnecessary? Did the American Eighth Air Force, operating mostly from British bases, follow a more principled path in favoring daylight bombing, protected by American fighters, and ostensibly aimed only at specific military targets so as to reduce civilian and aircrew casualties?

And what of German sensibilities? Before Thursday's ceremony, extensive efforts were made to persuade the German government and Dresden city officials to send representatives to the ceremony, to broaden the theme of reconciliation, according to Air Commodore Malcolm White, the retired officer who is chairman of the Bomber Command Association that commissioned the memorial. But the Germans declined, citing the continued strong resentment in Dresden at the extent of its destruction.

The Germans were prepared only to discuss the wording of a commemorative message inscribed in a frieze above the heads of the Lancaster crew. It says, "This memorial also commemorates those of all nations who lost their lives in the bombing of 1939-1945."

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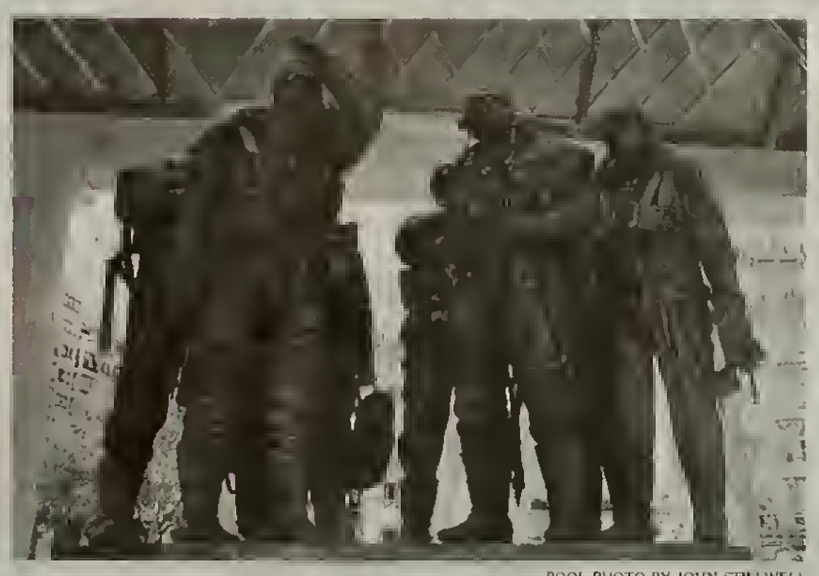

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Top, a Lancaster bomber dropping poppies at the Bomber Command memorial's opening. Left, a statue depicts a Lancaster crew. Squadron Leader Paula Willmot, center, sat with two veterans, Flight Sgt. Horace Burchett, left, and Flight Sgt. Ronald Hornby.

# *Meeting on Euro Opens Without Accord*

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like pooled debt would be counterproductive without the construction, first, of a political and economic union among the member states in the euro zone. Without mutual responsibility and control over national budgets, she argues, there cannot be mutual liabilities that can turn into blank checks.

While Italy and Spain make vital economic changes, they may and sign off on the growth pact, which would deploy up to $173 billion, mostly from unspent European Union funds.

The leaders will also discuss proposals for the future of the euro drafted by the heads of the major European institutions and released Tuesday, plans that could lead to the creation of a euro zone finance ministry and — eventually — greater sharing of debt burdens.

Measures under discussion to bank bailout agreed to this month will not put private investors at a disadvantage. The financial markets dislike the "preferred creditor" status of the euro zone bailout fund because it suggests that private investors in euro zone bonds might lose proportionately more in the event of a default.

While Mr. Monti, the Italian leader, has said he is willing to stay in Brussels all weekend to work out a deal, Ms. Merkel has made clear she intends to be back